

Queen's new image goes on coins in 1985

By Roger Boye

The years are catching up with Queen Elizabeth II.

Starting in 1985, the British Royal Mint will use a new portrait of her majesty on United Kingdom coinage. The image includes a facial wrinkle and sagging skin, more accurately reflecting the appearance of the 58-year-old monarch.

The portrait will be only the third on circulating coins since Queen Elizabeth's reign began in 1952, and the first change since 1968. Unlike the two earlier profiles, the queen is shown wearing an earring and necklace in the latest rendition.

Normally, some other British Commonwealth countries place a monarch's restyled portrait on their coinage soon after the United Kingdom introduces it. But this time Canada may develop its own version.

"We're leading toward an open competition among Canadian artists," said Dennis Cudahy, vice president of manufacturing for the Royal Canadian Mint. "The competitions we've held in recent years for our [commemorative] dollars have resulted in some stimulating designs."

A new portrait of the queen won't appear on Canadian coins until at least 1987 if the government decides to conduct a contest, Cudahy added.

● The last two gold medallions in a five-year U.S. program will go on sale by early November, mint director Donna Pope said at the recent American Numismatic Association convention in Detroit.

One-ounce specimens dated 1984 depict actress Helen Hayes, and the half-ounce pieces feature novelist John Steinbeck. Earlier medals honored eight other outstanding Americans in the arts.

● A hobby newspaper has praised a government decision to destroy 8,634 error dimes discovered in sealed trays at the San Francisco Assay Office.

"The Mint is doing its job . . . and the long-term interests of the hobby are served," said a Numismatic News editorial. "Relaxing present Mint policy [to destroy error coins] would open up the system to shoddy production methods."

The dimes—1983 proof specimens—were melted because they lacked the "S" mint mark. Last year, government workers put several hundred error dimes in proof sets and mailed the sets to collectors before the mistake was noticed. Proof sets containing a 1983 no-mint-mark dime currently retail for \$750 or more.

The integrity of the U.S. Mint would have suffered if the government had knowingly distributed the newer batch of 8,634 error dimes in an attempt to excite hobbyists or to make money from collectors, the editorial said.